

How to Protect Your Hearing

If you are frequently exposed to loud noises, a variety of ear protection devices are available that decrease the loudness of sounds and protect your hearing from damage. You can purchase these devices in most pharmacies, hardware stores, and sporting goods stores.

Earplugs are placed into the ear canal so that they totally block the canal. They come in various shapes and sizes, or can be custom made by taking an impression of your ear. Earplugs can reduce noise 15-30 dB depending on how they are made and fit.

Ear Muffs fit completely over both ears and must fit tightly to block sound from entering the ears. Muffs can reduce noise 15-30 dB depending on how they are made and fit.

Earplugs and Ear Muffs used together achieve even greater sound reduction. Use of earplugs and ear muffs is recommended for high noise exposure.

Cotton in the ear is not considered appropriate ear protection due to the fact that it does not effectively block the ear canal. Cotton has been found to reduce sound by only 5-7 dB.

Common Sources of Noise

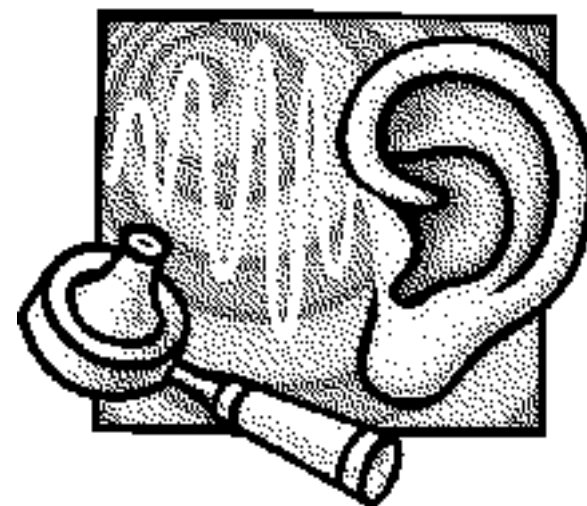
• 0 dB	Threshold of normal hearing
• 10 dB	Normal breathing
• 20 dB	Rustling leaves
• 25 dB	Whispered voice
• 60 dB	Clothes dryer
• 60 dB	Normal conversation 3-5 feet
• 65 dB	Dishwasher
• 75 dB	City traffic noise
• 80 dB	Alarm clock
• 85 dB	Average factory noise
• 90 dB	Screaming child, motorcycle
• 100 dB	Subway train, diesel truck, jackhammer
• 105 dB	Power mower, helicopter
• 110 dB	Power saw, chainsaw
• 120 dB	Football stadium, band concert, thunder, car horn
• 130 dB	Air raid siren
• 140 dB	Pain starts, gunshot, jet engine, fireworks
• 180 dB	Rocket launching
• 194 dB	Loudest possible sound

Who Can I Contact For More Information?

Many organizations are committed to preventing Noise-Induced Hearing Loss. They can answer questions, offer suggestions, and provide printed or online information. Contact The Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission for referrals to these organizations or log on to our website. We have a Noise Induced Hearing Loss section on the link page.

www.idhhc.state.il.us

Protecting Your Ears



V/TTY: 217.557.4495

V/TTY: 877.455.3323

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Who Should Worry About Noise?

Approximately 28 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss due to a variety of factors including genetics, head injury, illness, or ototoxic drugs. This number will increase because the American population ages, as hearing loss is a common part of the aging process. Many are losing their hearing to something that can be avoided - **excessive exposure to loud noises.**

Americans are constantly exposed to loud noises - factory noises, loud music, power tools, fireworks, farm equipment, airplanes, trains, subways, motorcycles and various intense, natural and man-made sounds. Constant exposure to loud noises can cause Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) or tinnitus (ringing in the ears). While noise-induced hearing loss is generally irreversible, it is the most preventable cause and its risk can be reduced with some simple precautions.

Illinois Deaf and Hard of Hearing Commission

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In a word...**EVERYONE.** No matter how old or young you are. It is estimated that approximately 30 million people are at risk for noise-induced hearing loss in the workplace, in recreational settings, and at home. An estimated 10 million Americans now have permanent damage to their hearing as a result of exposure to loud noises. You may not realize that everyday noises that you are exposed to are dangerous to your ears. Your ears are very sensitive and too much exposure to loud noises for prolonged periods of time can permanently damage your hearing. Noise-induced hearing loss is the most common occupational injury.

How Much is Too Much?

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the maximum safe exposure to noise is no more than 85 decibels (dB) over a period of 8 hours. A mere 3 dB increase actually doubles the sound intensity, reducing the exposure time to no more than 4 hours. At 110 dB, one should not be exposed for more than a minute and a half. A short, loud and intense sound such as an explosion or a gunshot may cause immediate hearing loss.

Prolonged exposure, without protection, to noise levels above 85 decibels or sudden, loud and intense noises can lead to permanent hearing loss and/or tinnitus.

How Do You Know if Noise is Affecting Your Ears?

Many times, hearing damage occurs so gradually that you may not even realize you are losing your hearing. The most common warning sign is that your hearing begins to feel muffled, distorted or stuffy and/or you sense ringing or dull pain in your ears (tinnitus).

How Can I Protect My Hearing in Noisy Situations?

If you are in a noisy environment and notice a change in your hearing such as, muffled hearing and/or ringing in your ears, it is usually temporary and a warning that the noise is too much. Remove yourself from the noisy environment immediately and give your ears time to recover. Ways to avoid over-exposure to dangerous level of noises include lowering the volume of such noise, standing far away from the noise source, and wearing ear protection.